

Sunday January 31, 2016

Scripture Readings

The book of Jeremiah preserves an account of the prophetic ministry of Jeremiah, whose personal life and struggles are shown to us in greater depth and detail than those of any other OT prophet. Given to self-analysis and self-criticism, Jeremiah has revealed a great deal about himself. Although timid by nature, he received the Lord's assurance that he would become strong and courageous. For Jeremiah, God was ultimate. The prophet's theology conceived of God as the Creator of all that exists, as all-powerful, as everywhere present. Jeremiah ascribed the most elevated attributes to the God whom he served, viewing him as the God not only of Judah but also of the nations. At the same time, God is very much concerned about individual people and their accountability to him. Jeremiah's emphasis in this regard is similar to that of Ezekiel, and the two men have become known as the "prophets of individual responsibility."

Jeremiah 1: 4-10

⁴ This is what God said: ⁵ "Before I shaped you in the womb, I knew all about you. Before you saw the light of day, I had holy plans for you: A prophet to the nations - that's what I had in mind for you." ⁶ But I said, "Hold it, Master God! Look at me. I don't know anything. I'm only a boy!" ⁷ God told me, "Don't say, 'I'm only a boy.' I'll tell you where to go and you'll go there. I'll tell you what to say and you'll say it." ⁸ Don't be afraid of a soul. I'll be right there, looking after you." God's Decree. ⁹ God reached out, touched my mouth, and said, "Look! I've just put my words in your mouth - hand-delivered!" ¹⁰ See what I've done? I've given you a job to do among nations and governments - a red-letter day! Your job is to pull up and tear down, take apart and demolish, And then start over, building and planting." Stand Up and Say Your Piece.

The passage this morning from 1 Corinthians is most recognized as one of those passages that many will use during their wedding ceremony, but this passage goes far beyond that. This letter of Paul was written to the Christian church at Corinth, who was in the midst of a great deal of struggle and strife. The context of the passage is explaining the misuse and misunderstanding of spiritual gifts. Spiritual gifts are those talents and abilities that God gives a believer to carry out His will in their lives. Any time you have an ability or talent and use it there is the possibility of its misuse. There is possibility of having experiencing pride and doing good things for the wrong motives. God is not so much interested in what we do, but why we do it.

1Corinthians 13: 1-13

¹ If I speak with human eloquence and angelic ecstasy but don't love, I'm nothing but the creaking of a rusty gate. ² If I speak God's Word with power, revealing all his mysteries and making everything plain as day, and if I have faith that says to a mountain, "Jump," and it jumps, but I don't love, I'm nothing. ³⁻⁷ If I give everything I own to the poor and even go to the stake to be burned as a martyr, but I don't love, I've gotten nowhere. So, no matter what I say, what I believe, and what I do, I'm bankrupt without love.

Love never gives up.

Love cares more for others than for self.

Love doesn't want what it doesn't have.

Love doesn't strut,

Doesn't have a swelled head,

Doesn't force itself on others,

Isn't always "me first,"

Doesn't fly off the handle,

Doesn't keep score of the sins of others,

Doesn't revel when others grovel,

Takes pleasure in the flowering of truth,

Puts up with anything,

Trusts God always,

Always looks for the best,

Never looks back,

But keeps going to the end.

⁸⁻¹⁰ Love never dies. Inspired speech will be over some day; praying in tongues will end; understanding will reach its limit. We know only a portion of the truth, and

what we say about God is always incomplete. But when the Complete arrives, our incompletes will be canceled.

¹¹ When I was an infant at my mother's breast, I gurgled and cooed like any infant. When I grew up, I left those infant ways for good. ¹² We don't yet see things clearly. We're squinting in a fog, peering through a mist. But it won't be long before the weather clears and the sun shines bright! We'll see it all then, see it all as clearly as God sees us, knowing him directly just as he knows us! ¹³ But for right now, until that completeness, we have three things to do to lead us toward that consummation: Trust steadily in God, hope unswervingly, love extravagantly. And the best of the three is love.

Sermon – What is love?

I will be honest I was quite excited when I realized that one of the readings in the lectionary this week was 1Corinthians chapter 13. Of course someone did point out to me that this readings actually comes around every 3 years, as the lectionary is a 3 year cycle and so okay I may not be that observant.

I suppose that part of the reason that I was excited about this scripture passage is that I have, as have many of you, heard this scripture used at weddings. I do think that the passage from 1Corinthians has a lot to say to couples getting married about how to live out a relationship, I think that there is a whole lot more to this scripture.

This passage speak of love, but I suppose that the first question I have is; what is love?

If we think about love, where do we learn things about love today? We learn how to love from our families, we learn how to love from friends. We also learn what it means to love from society and this includes movies and television.

So I thought I would look on the internet to see what is says about love and what we see as love in movies and I found storypick.com and a post about ten differences between love in the movies and love in real life, so here they are;

1. Movie life: One person leaves everything to be with the person they love

Real life: It'd be great at first, till they start pulling each others' hair 5 years down the line

2. Movie life: Guy is the cool guy and a people's person, but ends up falling for the nerd girl who is always quiet and reserved

Real life: Guy is a people's person, and doesn't even know the quiet and reserved girl exists

3. Movie life: Nerdy girl/guy takes off glasses and dresses better, and becomes automatically sexy

Real life: Nerdy girl/guy takes off glasses and looks weird because no one has seen him/her without glasses before

4. Movie life: The shy girl/guy, who is too shy to perform in public spaces, mesmerizes everyone with a wonderful performance

Real life: The shy girl/guy who doesn't normally dance etc in public spaces probably really doesn't know how to dance

5. Movie life: Background songs make us realize how the character is feeling

Real life: No background songs, so you have no idea how to feel

6. Movie life: Saying goodbye to someone you love at the airport is an emotional moment

Real life: The person you want to say goodbye to is already late, so they run before you can even get emotional

7. Movie life: When you say 'I love you' for the first time, the other person is feeling it too

Real life: You're basically terrified of being the first one to say it

8. Movie life: One person is enough to fight all the bad guys

Real life: Only one bad guy is enough to scare a person

9. Movie life: Guy keeps pursuing girl, girl gets convinced eventually and falls in love

Real life: Guy keeps pursuing girl, girl takes out pepper spray

10. Movie life: Girl meets bad guy, decides to turn him into a good guy

Real life: Girl meets bad guy, decides to change him, gets dumped, goes to find a genuinely good guy

So when we hear this passage from 1Corinthians at a wedding we associate it with romantic love, and that is what movies and television tell us love looks like, but in the context of this scripture there is so much more that this scripture is speaking about.

This scripture was written to the people in Corinth and as Sharon spoke about last week there was a lot of issues, problems, and disagreements going on inside the community at Corinth. There were arguments around gifts of the Spirit and which one was most important, there were faith leaders whose popularity seemed to be getting the better of them, as they were becoming more important than the beliefs and faith themselves.

And this is to what Paul is writing and Paul is trying to give the people of Corinth a new way of being. What Paul is speaking about is not just about romantic type of love, but rather how we interact with all that we meet. Paul is telling the people of Corinth that everything that they are doing needs to be done in love, not with selfish motives for personal gain, or to make themselves look better in the eyes of others, rather it is not that at all, it is the complete opposite, love really means that we are to open ourselves up to something greater than ourselves. But this kind of loving is risky because if we open ourselves up to love we risk being changed, we cannot go on with our lives the same old way. This type of loving is about making room in our souls and hearts for the stories of others, their experiences, things that many of us have never imagined holding. It really is about moving deeper into knowing someone, moving beyond surface assumptions, prejudices, and habits to truly see and receive those others who are in front of us. In some cases it is about risking having our hearts broken and remade as we take in both the brokenness and beauty of the world, because in reality the astounding wonder of the world will never leave us unchanged.

If we take a step back for a second and look once more at love, what do we understand as love with a capital L. Love with a capital L is another way we understand God. So if we go back to Paul and we see what we are called to, we are called to speak in love, we are called to speak in God. We are called to act in love, we are called to act in God. We are being called to open ourselves up to the Love that is God and in opening ourselves up to that Love we are able to then open ourselves up to all those around us without fear of being changed because we are supported by God who is Love.

This all sounds good, but I ask how do we do this, in the reading from Jeremiah we get an indication of this. Jeremiah was called to be a prophet when he was only a boy and he questioned his call, he believed that he was just a boy and had nothing to say, but God has a response to that. God told Jeremiah that he only needed to trust and to open himself to the presence of God and God would be in his mind, in his heart, and on this tongue.

We are called to do the same. Paul reminds us that in our humanity we are but seeing only a part of the truth of God and eventually we will see all that is God, but for now it is limited and so we are called to trust in God who is love. We are to become conduits for God's love in our lives and then we can really be open to those stories of those around us. When we do this, when we open ourselves up to God, open ourselves up to Love, we will be able to live in this world in love, speak in love and act in love.

I want revert back to the movies and in particular the Disney movie, Beauty and the Beast. We all know the story, it is about the beautiful Belle, who sacrifices her life to live with beast and eventually comes to see his through his own experiences and comes to love him. It can be considered a pretty sappy love story, but then I read something that made me think twice and relates to our readings today. It is what one philosopher called the fairy tale's 'great message' – 'that a thing must be loved before it is lovable'. A thing must be loved before it is loveable. We are loved, by a God who loves us and so we are lovable. Can you imagine what could happen if we lived out Paul's letter to the Corinthians, if we lived in love. Not only would we be transformed, but so would all we meet, as they come to understand that they too are lovable, because we have loved them. We can transform the world in love, all because we took the chance to open ourselves up to the love of God and chose to pass that love along to other, to speak, and act in love, which would transform the world, bringing God's kingdom to being in the here and now. A challenge and a blessing, but living in God it can be done. Amen.